

東洋大学学術情報リポジトリ Toyo University Repository for Academic Resources

On imperatives of coexistence and communication

著者	Joff Peter Norman Bradley
雑誌名	dialogos
号	13
ページ	127-152
発行年	2013-03
URL	http://id.nii.ac.jp/1060/00005049/

On imperatives of coexistence and communication

Joff Peter Norman Bradley

In this essay I explore the possibility of a Lingisian philosophy of justice and ecology by considering the notion of imperatives emerging from both humans and the environment at large. I also inquire into the possibility of speaking in one's own name and voice in a manner not circumscribed by the ordering of the order-words (*mots d'ordre*). I do this by examining a keynote lecture at the 2012 Society for European Philosophy conference in Manchester, England, by emeritus philosopher Alphonso Lingis. In the lecture entitled the *Return of Subjectivity*, Lingis discusses the nature of order-words and their connection to what he terms self-conscious subjectivity. Reworking his numerous ruminations on the problem of language and subjectivity, he questioned anew the nature of performative speech acts. His conclusion was innovative and experimental and worthy of deep reflection. I shall extend and connect his remarks to ecology and, in particular, to the notions of coexistence and communication – two pivotal concepts in his phenomenology - to consider if one can indeed extricate oneself from the horror of the always-already *said* to speak the singularly new, to speak in one's own name. Or put another way, I shall ask after the contexts in which one finds it is oneself saying something 'essential' (Lingis, 1994, p. 116). My own standpoint will be to think communication and coexistence through a consideration of phenomenology, ecological thought and the infinite demand of the other.

Keywords: Lingis, coexistence, ecology, Levinas, phenomenology, subjectivity

One's words

If one's words are always already ordered, how can one speak other than the demands and imperatives emitted from elsewhere? If the social machine orders self-conscious speech acts, what is the condition of possibility of fleeing? Speech acts are taken not as intuitive or representational but as pragmatic manoeuvres commanded from the outside. Through the circulation of order-words, the voice of the first person pronoun 'I' appears elsewhere, always-already formed through cliché and hearsay, from order-words. Let us take Lingis to mean that order-words are those 'brief, trenchant expressions' - passwords, watchwords, and clues - which direct us to suitable discourse. Talk, Lingis says, consists entirely of quotations, hearsay, of commands which we pass on to others. In this way, one's own voice seems to belong elsewhere.

Prior to the speech that is imperative and informative, that directs, orders and commands, Lingis argues that there is a communication much more primary and fundamental. In an essay entitled 'Violations', Lingis says: it is a communication 'for those not here and for those who we laugh with and weep over. Our speech is polarised by the grand things, the blessed events that come as surprises and accidents from the outside, and also by the sinister things' (see Buckner, 2006, p. 24).

To escape the treadmill of hearsay and the everyday chatter of *the they*, Lingis considers how the notion of self-consciousness finds its way into the *oeuvre* of Deleuze & Guattari. He considers the rhythms and movements of the self and wonders how it is that the self connects through bodily comportment and gait. That the self is not a singular consciousness but porous to the point of dissolution suggests the dispersal of subjectivity. In vital movements within oneself, Lingis argues, one finds an intensive sense of the other in oneself, which suggests that meaning is drawn from discrete units as 'patterns of variation' pertaining to

different situations - a kind of incorporeal property ascribable to bodies and events.

Order-words are historical yet constitute a discontinuous multiplicity as each of them is uttered at a datable moment. They are commands rather than information, with little consistency and coherence among them. Communication with things is not extraction of information or data, but of finding oneself invaded and populated (see Bradley, 2011). In a discussion on the event of the face, Lingis adds that the black hole of the face absorbs and annihilates the polyvocality of expression. The eyes in the face - which individuate you as an anonymous and changeable member of a particular pact - isolate you - grant imperative force to passwords, watchwords, and clues. The eyes are orders and prohibitions. In the searching of that which singles you out, which takes you in, there are black holes - which consume all in the issuing of prohibitions.

Judith Poxon (in Taylor, 2002, p. 221) find in Lingis's phenomenology the idea that the nonhuman world 'seduces' the subject in some way through fragmentary demands of a fundamental nature equal to or if not more powerful than the ethical demands by the human other. In this way, and applying a Deleuzian reading of difference and repetition, Lingis opens up the possibility of a return to the pre-Kantian world of things in themselves.

Critical of the narrow human-directed framework of Levinas, Lingis refuses to delimit ethical experience to the confrontation with another human being. He claims that the demand in sensing the hunger and need of another human is extendable to other species. In a recent interview with Jonas Skačkauskas (2011), he argues: "If I come upon an injured bird or deer in a path, it is exactly the same thing, it seems to me." Speech acts are somehow utterances predicating intentional *affect*, and, which in some way, latch on to the identity of a subject. The self-conscious is affective. The affective self-conscious is derived from an

inner consistency that speaks from the imperative inherent in the intensities of objects, within worldliness. Lingis acknowledges the *tactility* of words - the way they come into contact with the world, the way they convey affective states.

Words produce self-consciousness, though not spontaneously or autonomously for it is the heteronomic other which forces one to give an account of oneself. Here we ask simply if the social machine faces and forces us to speak in our name and if there is no inner compulsion to authenticity, how does one auto-generate speech acts? Moreover, it is not compulsion to insight or truthfulness, but a question of singular or individual affective experiences and affective attachment to the face itself. Lingis (2012) argues: "The speaker attaches himself to the face that confronts him in anxiety, foreboding, deference, compliance." It is in considering pride, spite, shame and resentment that when I speak I submit myself to judgment. I am called upon to intervene in events. I commit myself to a course of action. I justify myself in my own name and do not represent anyone. Here the 'I' becomes an opening for movement. The order-word in this sense becomes a cry of alarm; it indicates a line of flight. Words here are those said not for their representational form but for their condensing, intensifying force. They become mantras (Lingis, 1994, p. 64).

It is in bodily actions, multiple movements, in the properties of bodily flows and excitations that speech acts transgress an inflicted verdict. One finds multiple affects in a particular action. We seek more complex polyvocal expressions of those movements, with concepts which are themselves more complex and variable. Lingis says it is in multiple movements and connections that we break free of the verdict placed upon us. Following Deleuze, Lingis says it is in 'the harshest exercise of depersonalisation' (Deleuze, 1995, p. 6) that we engage in becoming-other. It is in communion with animals, rivers, stones, clouds that we learn to say simple things in our own name.

For Lingis, self-consciousness is a passionate attachment that radiates an affective sense of oneself. Although passionate attachment is ordered by the social machinery, it is in the depths and riches in the object of attachment that produces a power in oneself to machine a becoming. Dorothy Olkowski (2011) makes the point well that it is the world of depths and abysses that sensibility can be drawn in *imperatively* to the vortices that populate these depths.

OOO

As a dark precursor to the speculative realism of Graham Harman (2010), Lingis also echoes the fledgling thought experiments of the Object Oriented Ontology (OOO) of Quentin Meillassoux (2008), Ray Brassier (2007) *et al*, (though he would object to eliding the distinction between things and objects). OOO is a criticism of correlationism, which is said to pertain to the belief that things can only exist in relation to human minds or language. OOO aims to decentre the human subject in order to return to the things themselves, in all their uncanny *thinginess*. It is to affirm Husserl's and Heidegger's arguments that things have an irreducible, *slippery*, dark side. Through this radical realist prism, there is a move away from subject-object to object-object relationships. It is a realist ontology which seeks to explain the interrelationship between objects. Writing of the 'revenge' of the hyperobjects, Timothy Morton (2010) explicates on the 'non-local' object, a *thing in itself*, that is 'massively distributed in time and space such that any particular (local) manifestation never reveals the totality of [it]'. He explains (2011, p. 165): "We've become so used to hearing 'object' in relation to 'subject' that it takes some time to acclimatize to a view in which there are only objects, one of which is ourselves."

Yet, for Lingis, what we perceive is real. In a paper entitled 'Return of the First-Person Singular' (2012b, p. 172), Lingis says what is perceived, what orders

our sensibility and movements, is not simply a linguistic and social construct. As such he argues, we need a theory - a more concrete concept of the first-person singular - that understands this reality of this ordering force. Lingis asks of the imperatives in things, in nature's accomplishments. As he says: "We recognize an imperative when we recognise what is threatened or important. And assistance is urgent and we are the one who is there and who has the power to act" (Lingis, 2012a). It is here that we sense a similarity with the ecological issues of Morton who invokes a sensitivity to the imperative of things which directs and guides. Working through Lingis and applying the implication to ecological and object-oriented philosophy, Morton (2007) designates his symbiotic concept of the mesh or interconnectedness as a sensual object. Here existence is primarily being as coexistence. Morton thinks the absolute withdrawal of things in terms of the Lingisian imperative. The inhering force of the world summons us as subjects. The sensibility that withdraws from the world is subjected to the elemental as that which precedes the world and things. In the retreat from the world, we are subjected to the elemental imperative. Although Kant's imperatives have the *form* of law, the imperative in Lingisian phenomenology describes the *forces* of things and other persons. Therefore Lingis rejects Kant's notion of autonomy as unnecessarily inward-looking and remote, and therefore, clearly disconnected from the exteriority of things, objects, and persons. Yet his elemental imperative reflects Kant's notion of the sublime as a fundamental imperative mode. For Lingis, moral imperatives exceed the over-formalisation of Kantian law through the absolute alterity of the other. While both Kant and Lingis concur with the primacy of the moral imperative, the imperative is not given from within the formal laws of thought, but the imperative is an invasion from without. The elemental is prior to metaphysics of alterity yet possesses an imperative that summons the subject to think fundamentally about the experience of life itself.

The elemental imperative is sensitive to the directives for sublime action to care for life on the earth. According to Wheeler (2008), it calls upon itself to deepen itself, to deepen its understanding and experience of life itself.

In describing the uncanniness of life forms as strange strangers, both familiar and otherwise, and designating ecological thought as a description of the multitude of entangled strange strangers, a translation of Derrida's *arrivant*, the ultimate arrival, Morton appears to be writing in-between religious experience, anarchist thought and the phenomenology of Lingis. Coexistence sounds exceedingly similar to the mutual aid ideas of Peter Kropotkin (1955). The stranger is the foreigner. The encounter with a foreigner from another place, nation or world is uncanny; it is the strangest of all encounters. In another way, we can say that the 'I' is an ecological complex, comprised of the mesh of strange strangers, with each entity irreducible to the next, and unto itself.

Morton's ideas also share some similarity with Kinji Imanishi (1902-1992), who in his theory of shingengaku (nature-study) aims to decentres perception. The self, for Imanishi, is an event constituted in actions in relationship to the total environment, of which it is an integral part. Thinking against this view, and contra the concept of nature as such, Morton in his *The Ecological Thought*, invokes his idea of the mesh, described as all forms of life and dead life, as a way to think interconnectedness, connected with other beings - animal, vegetable, or mineral. For the self, the ego, subjectivity is not self-consolidating but only emerges through contact. Yet for Lingis (2001, p. 298) there is an ecological consciousness of a more primitive nature undergirding the mind of *homo faber*, that is to say, the vision of man as a tool-making animal popularised by Hannah Arendt (1998).

Self-conscious speech acts

In self-conscious speech how does one say something new? How does one speak to those yet to come, to the monstrous *arrivant*, to absolute alterity? It seems to me that this idea connects with the *événements* of May 1968 in Paris and the event in general. Compared to the ordering of the order-words, it is in the event of speaking in one's name that the inaugural and singular is uttered. The line of flight breaks through the ordering of the order-words to form a password – albeit temporary and recuperative – to say the new. The line of flight exceeds the idle talk comprised of quotations, hearsay, and cliché and the order-words in perpetual circulation. Moreover, contra ideologies which express interests of specific group or class, order-words command rather than disseminate information.

Lingis will say that speech acts produce self-consciousness even though they do not arrive spontaneously within us. They are rather imposed upon the 'I' from without. It is not in inner compulsion to authenticity and truthfulness, Lingis says that one speaks as oneself because it is others, the social machine, which compels the 'I' to speak. The way out of this nightmare for Lingis is a question of affective attachment. It is the way the speaker attaches himself to the face that confronts him in anxiety, foreboding, deference and compliance. Importantly, to speak in one's own name means to enter into events, to submit oneself to judgment, to be held accountable. While the social machine binds us to production of self-conscious acts, Lingis argues we can in some way exceed the limits of commands, and transgress the verdict put upon us through by 'bodily actions, multiple movements in the properties of bodily flows and excitations' (2012a).

Poetically, Lingis thinks beyond the face of a social machinery that sanctions and prohibits, and envisages a world as 'a set of directions and directives' (1999b,

p. 290), where multiple drives passionately attach to things which guide our lives. In *Dangerous Emotions* (2000, p. 71), Lingis considers the idea of blessing and grace as the beginning and end of ecological awareness: "A thinker who comprehends with the hands, hands made for blessing, sees swallows and owls, wetlands and tundra pullulate with grace. Blessing is the beginning and the end of all ecological awareness."

Regardless of shared language or culture, Lingis says in a community of those who have nothing in common, it is in communal laughter, in *unconditional transparency*, that we communicate something to the other. It is in a kind of nonsensical communication when the everyday resource of language breaks down, when there is a fracture in the established order of things, that we communicate something meaningful. It is when our fortresses, draw-bridges, walls and doors are rendered useless, that we must expose our vulnerability to the other.

Resonating somewhat with Walter Benjamin's statement that it is only for the sake of those without hope that hope is given to us, Lingis says it is in the exposure of vulnerability to the other that responsibility emerges. In finding oneself summoned, Lingis (1989, p. 146) says, one has 'to answer to the other for the wants and failings, the deeds and misdeeds, and even the very responsibility of the other'. Beneath and beyond the rational exchange of information, there is another form of community, the community of strangers. This community troubles the rational one as it acts as its double or shadow. Before the rational community of Hegel's 'I that is We' and 'We that is I', Lingis writes, there is the encounter with the other (Lingis, 1994, p. 10). It is not through the depersonalised intellect, abstract meaning or through the current dominant rational discourse of order-words that one exposes oneself to an imperative but through something more primary and existential. The spectre of the imperative stands outside

the rational community, or in the language of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) the apparatus of capture, and diminishes the range and scope of possibility of the sayable and the said. The imperative is heard in the *phatic* fact of speaking, the presence in being-there, in-the-accompanying-the-other-towards-death. In the prior sayable there is something more fundamental than the said. In the saying, we find the essential and weight of the imperative; something distinct from the said. Communication then is founded at the limit of communication when one must speak, when one's simple presence is sufficient to speak volumes. It is in listening to the soundless imperative of the other's presence, that the subject is directed and compelled to respond. Attunement to the environment is a listening to commands and imperatives. Following Levinas, Lingis will argue that before ontology, one is a being *for* someone prior to being *with*.

Levels

Lingis's phenomenology is based on a theory of levels - self-contained and mutually external levels - upon which things take form, upon which 'things see us'. In such spaces, we observe the anonymous, uncanny elemental, the *il y a* or there is, *a* thereness. The being of beings, *il y a*, the activity of sensual elements, precedes and undergirds the specificity of things. The *il y a* is 'the beginning of communication' (Lingis, 1994, p. 114). Yet the *il y a* is not perceptible through philosophical demonstration as such. Rather it is exposed through experience and expressed in literary writing as all communication is singular. The *il y a* is pain for it is through contamination and contact with alterity, in relations of exposure and abandon, that communication *takes* place. Lingis (1988, p.7-8) says on this point:

This imperative is located in the phenomenal field in which the other figures in

the measure that one perceives not simply a psychophysical organism responding to the pressures and lures of its empirical environment, but rather a nature jarred and buffeted by the forces of the environment, suffering the dictates of an imperative that does not reign immemorially in physical nature. One does not perceive the efficacy of an inner program regulating his organs and his limbs; one winces, one senses the pain. One does not perceive the pain where it is, in the psychic depth in which his own nervous circuitry knows itself; one senses it at the surfaces of contact.

Against the idea of holism in phenomenology, and at odds with Imanishi's anthropocentric holism (2002), the quasi-panpsychism of Lingis entertains the idea that the world is comprised of numerous self-contained and mutually external levels, to which humans must adjust their perceptions and ideas. Lingis extends the imperative from interpersonal ethics to the entire field of reality. Ethical imperatives emerge not only from other humans, but also from animals, plants, and even inanimate objects. The question is one of listening and hearing the summons as a portentous event addressed to one's sensibility, a sensibility which is a response to the directives of things. *Intense communication* is therefore articulated in directives found in the 'carpentry of things' (Lingis, 1994, p. 41), in the 'pageantry of things', in the face of the other. Thought is obedience to the directives which summon us. The movement of perception responds to the directives in things, which emerge in the elements, as sensuous realities and intelligent structures, and through myriad plateaus and levels. Sensuality is a pathic movement of involution.

Lingis expounds a phenomenology of the levels, which are depicted as the site through which things take form. Sensuous elements are depths without surfaces or boundaries. It is in this explication that we see Lingis thinking nature

or ‘the fathomless plenum of the elements’ *aesthetically* through the sublime. For Lingis, the levels are not the network of practicable, instrumental couplings (1998, p. 27). Rather the correspondence, coherence and consistency of levels summons us to a directive to act ethically. Considering the ecological sensitivity implied in the theory of levels, Harman, a former student of Lingis, (2005, p. 83) notes: “What we actually do is listen and respond to the weakness of the bird and the frailty of the flower, and ratchet our tenderness or viciousness up to the appropriate level needed to comfort or destroy these creatures.”

In discussing the nature of reality and things, Lingis adds that reality weighs on the subject oppressively and to such an extent that one cannot be indifferent to it (Lingis, 1998, p. 119). An imperative weighs on thought to the extent that thought finds oneself commanded to think. As such, we must respond to the elemental which itself weighs on us as an ‘alimentary imperative’ (Sparrow, 2008). Lingis says that in the environment, as a field of intensive forces, vibrant according to inner codes, the care one living being has for another, for an injured animal, or for a plant pushing its way to the sun, is found in the antenna of our *restlessness*. As such, we are singularised in carrying out this action. Lingis designates the elemental as ‘unformed prime matter’ (Lingis, 1986). It is infinite, multi-leveled, and comprised of myriad levels. The element is the alterity of sensuous material: the alimentary. Alterity always arrives from sensible material. There is an imperative in the sensibility that exposes itself to the element in which sensory patterns and forces take form. Lingis adds that the carnal face of the other is an elemental imperative. The notion of imperative enacts a ‘certain kinds of symbioses’ and describes the certain ways in which the outside invades us. The perception of the presence or perception of the things themselves is the perception or existence of real sensory objects.

On the basis of this ecological sensitivity, things are important *in themselves*,

and to realise this is to see what they require to exist, to see what harms or threatens; it is to sense the powers to safeguard or nurture, to rescue or repair. It is to sense the imperative to protect what is threatened or when assistance is commanded or requested. It is to register that it is 'I' who is the one who is there and has the power to act. The imperative that commands is not part of a verdict-producing machine but one which at once directs and guides. Lingis writes of the alien imperative which is felt 'in the surfaces with which the other faces me with his or her weariness and vulnerability and which afflicts me and confound my intentions' (1994, p. 32). Following Levinas, Lingis says the anarchic responsibility to the other is the condition of existence. The 'I' cannot be without a prior responsibility to the other. Lingis describes the relationship with alterity as a bond, of being 'commanded, contested, having to answer to another for what one does and for what one is. It is also finding oneself addressed, appealed to...' (Lingis in Levinas, 2002, p. xxii).

Sparrow (2009) makes the claim that Lingis is set on formulating a full-blown corporeal or inter-corporeal materialism of being-in-the-world. Through the phenomenological exposition of the polyvocality of the face, Lingis takes his cue from Levinas to ruminate upon the sense of exposure to the outside emergent from within the materiality of sensation. According to Lingis, beneath the rational everydayness of anonymous discourse is a relationship which demands the exposure and denuding of consciousness to itself and to the stranger, to the intruder - the one with whom one has nothing in common.

Lingis's model of communication is constructed from the work of Serres, Bataille, Nancy, Blanchot among others, and draws on the phenomenological themes of alterity in Heidegger and Levinas. In modifying the abstract formalism of Husserlian transcendental phenomenology, Lingis reconfigures the Merleau-Pontian notion of a *praktognosis* oriented to things, where *praktognosis*

is embodied, practical knowledge or the *being able to*. Using ideas shaped by Heidegger and Levinas, the ethical dimension to the imperative springs from the simplest focus of our eyes in a particular way to see a certain object, or to treat objects in specific ways. Exposure to the vulnerability of the face, dethrones the ontological right to existence. It is in our openness and in our gaze that things reveal themselves and approach us. The empathy which emerges from this is the answering of a need, the satisfaction of a want with one's own substance. In the preface to *Otherwise than being* (2002, xxii), Lingis describes Levinas's ethical injunction thus:

It is even to be responsible for the very pain he causes me, at the limit for his persecution - the contestation he formulates against me for what I did not author or authorise.

The imperative of anarchic justice

The imperative of anarchic justice is outside the bounds of normative ethics. It asks of the possibility of permanent and peaceful coexistence with the incommensurable, with the stranger, with the other. The imperative from things is prior to the always-already order of the order-words, prior to the repetition of the always-already *said*. Here it is imperative to think the theory of communication as a consideration of the Lingisian posed question of how distress in the 'outer zones' - in the sink estates, banlieues, favellas and slums - through kinds of separation and exclusion - becomes our distress when confronted with the face that beseeches, that makes infinite demands. His suggestion is that it is only in the 'wretched places' that we come into contact with the 'strong emotions' (2000, p. 80). Contact is therefore the elemental relation, the foundationless foundation of ethical relationships.

Lingis thinks the notion of distress through an interpretation of Jean-Luc Nancy's work (1991) and considers how knowledge is acquired with singularities in common through a kind of coexistence with alterity. Here *coexistence* is a becoming, a becoming-other. Nancy says it is in our distress that we know our *coexistence*. In this jolting of the everyday, there is an *imperative* – a composite of Merleau-Ponty's directives for perception and Levinas's doctrine of absolute alterity and themes of exteriority - of cooperation, collaboration, partnership - *and* coexistence with the other. It is in contact and in empathising with the distress of the other, that we become aware of a shared finitude. Despite the unworking nature of the *communitas*, we become aware of the horrors committed in our name, we become cognisant of the acts against the other, the downtrodden, the poor, the foreign and altogether different. Nancy writes in *Inoperative Community* (1991, p. 71): "Community means here the socially exposed particularity in opposition to the socially imploded generality characteristic of capitalism." This point is shared by Lingis in his critique of the death-in-life subjectivity found in the what he terms transnational 'archipelago of urban technopoles'.

To understand this point it is important to appreciate how distress in the outer zones becomes our own. In an essay entitled 'Anger' (see Sheppard, 1997, p. 12), Lingis inquires into the shared sense of distress when we gain knowledge of the 'exterminations wrought upon peoples in and also the culture of technicisation and simulation that reigns in the richest urban technopoles'. Animus is directed to the ominous humanity *becoming* tangible - tangible in its inhumanity (Sheppard, 1997, p. 204).

There is also an account of ethical experience in Lingis not limited to the face of one's own kind but to other species. Influenced by Levinas again on this point, Lingis says the face which stands before me is also faced by third parties, who

face with appeals and demands. In this cycle of triadic mutual self-recognition, responsibility is responsibility for the needs and wants of all humans. For Levinas, face-to-face encounters ultimately produces a demand for justice, society and the state (2002, p. 161). On this reading, political institutions are founded on this original ethical coexistence of a group of people, an originary community (Ryder, 2012, p. 121). In this ultimately asymmetrical encounter, I am responsible for the other's infinite needs and wants, and for all those who face him and all those who face those who face him.

It is also in nature that we perhaps find order-words that compel us to act in this or that ethical way. In the eyes of a face that single me out – in the feline eyes of Derrida's cat - one is ordered to add imperative force to passwords, watchwords, and clues. It is in the look of the eyes of the other which demands an ethical relationship and which asks for compassion, human agency and moral responsibility. Obligation derives from the direct perception of the other facing me, making demands upon me.

Returning to the 2012 lecture, we find Lingis describing the imperatives in things, explicating upon imperatives which guide and counsel, which sustain the specific forces of the first-person singular. Underscoring Lingis's thought is an exhortation to learn to listen to material substance, the things themselves, to adopt a new sensitivity to the nature of things. It is through a passionate comportment to things that we learn to say something in our own name. It is with the multiple drives which passionately attach to things and which guide our lives that we become sensitive to the imperative of things. In Lingisian phenomenology, the nonhuman world 'seduces' the 'I' through ethical demands equal to the human other.

The ethical exhortation in Lingis is a mode of cosmological thinking (Mickunas, 1978) opposed in degree to the calculative, utilitarian logic of capital

and modern rationality. The ethical injunction is akin to Kant's but exceeds the limits of rationalist humanism. Lingis's method of embodied phenomenology is at once poetic, richly metaphoric and descriptive. His own writing is itself an ethical act, an ethical address, as it contests the presuppositions of modern rationality, and what lies on the thither side of thought and calculation. It is a listening to the internal noise. A sensitivity to the intimacy between living things. Here the ethical dimension is not deontological in the strict Kantian sense because Lingis begins with the external force of the imperative, whereas Kant begins with its internal formulation in theoretical reason. Working interstitially between Kant and Levinas, Lingis finds the subject in subjection to exterior forces and responding in responsibility. Lingis concurs that the imperative is self-regulating: "The imperative commands thought to order" (Lingis, 1998. p. 180). Contra the self-legislating subject of Kant, the imperative harks first from the outside, from the thither side of alterity. Fusing Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, the ethics as first philosophy of Levinas, Nancy's notion of inoperable community, Bataille's atheology and Deleuze & Guattari's schizoanalysis, it seems quite obvious that Lingis thinks the demand placed upon the subject quite differently than Kant, for the subject is more intimately entwined with nature. The subject is taken to be an emotional, sensual, embodied, empathetic and rational being. Although Lingis concurs with Kant that it is not nature that orders thought, but thought that orders nature through the imperative, this view of the other mirrors Levinas's idea that the otherness of the other is constituted by the exteriority of the imperative. In response to Levinas's alterity as a contestation of our contentment in the elemental, Lingis criticises as unviable the metaphysical concepts of pleasure, enjoyment, and contentment, with which Levinas understood the sensibility that is prior to the perception of things. Moreover, Lingis questions Heidegger's view of equipment (*Zeug*) as

‘always already’ for anyone. Here the elemental imperative is closer to Levinas’s *apeiron* or cosmology, which culminates not in *telos* but in a sustaining medium of levels without dimensions or horizons

It is in joy that Lingis finds a route between or beyond Kant’s categorical and hypothetical status of the imperative. Yet, critics of Lingis such as Nozaki (2008) here simply miss the point by insisting on the distinction between ethics as first philosophy and normative ethics. As phenomenology inquires into the relation between saying and the said, which is the ground of human discourse and ethics, Lingis develops this Levinasian notion as the source of imperative force that is obeyed before any interior formulation in law. Lingis’s *oeuvre* then is not strictly an anti-rationalism (反合理主義) but more a critique of a particular disembodied mode of subjectivity, that form of capitalistic, flattened rationality. Lingis is not anti-rationalist *per se* as Nozaki, mistakenly, claims but a thinker who contests the limits of the sayable and the said. He finds in the phenomenological exposure to the other, moments where a different discourse is opened up, albeit briefly, to a shared humanity and coexistence.

Take for example a reference to the Japanese people. In one essay Lingis (2005) suggests that on one level the nature of the Japanese language – in its allusions and silences – means that a limit is perceived for many non-Japanese in understanding interactions and forms of Japanese art. Yet on another level Lingis writes as the itinerant philosopher and traveler who ruminates on the experiences without linguistic mediation. In a 2003 lecture entitled ‘Unintelligible Lines, Unknown Paths’, he says: “How often while walking the streets of a foreign city whose language or languages whose culture and values we do not understand, we have felt immersed in, one with this humanity?” In writing on what is at stake in conversation, Lingis argues that cultural forms of Japaneseness - the language, body kinesics, and so on - are not obstacles to the transmission of meaning and

affinity with the other. For it is in laughter and bodily comportment that one understands despite possession of a different subjectivity (see Ogawa, 1998). His contention is that one is often most moved in conversations with strangers, or those people from another land, another age (Ogawa, p. 151). Lingis will say that each time we enter into communication, we expose ourselves in some way to be emptied out, divested of convictions, expectations, and memories (2000, p. 100).

Lingis discerns in Levinas a philosophy of limits, a philosophy of the limits of language, the limits of the said. Lingis, following Levinas, scrutinises the idea of non-relationality to the other. The other is irreconcilable difference, beyond commonly held bonds and shared thoughts; it is a contestation to *das gerede*. For Lingis, the fundamental relation of the self to the other is prior to that which is common. Heterogenic difference to alterity is pre-ontologically ethical. There is an inescapable appeal before any information is bartered or shared. Against theories of communication which depict the others as agencies with which we exchange information, Lingis sees justice here as not a machine of disinterested calculus or utility but as concrete and particular, and found in acts of bravery. This deeper sense of justice, Lingis would argue, is an instinct that modern society seeks to erase from normative ethical debates.

There is therefore much that is ethical and critical of injustice in his work. Lingis's thought, as an act of itinerological interrogation, is a critique of what hard-headed, logic-chopping rationalism signifies. It is call for a more primordial ethics *qua* first philosophy. It is a treatment of the self as other than a singular, pure, disembodied consciousness. Rather the self is porous to the point of dissolution. It is through the phenomenological method that we discover a different sense of justice, ethics, freedom and equality in the exposure and suffering of the other. Contra Nozaki, it seems odd on this front to claim that a phenomenology of embodied subjectivity is anti-rational. Moreover, it is difficult

to see as Nozaki does that relativism follows from this line of reasoning. In the exposure to the other, phenomenology asks how we interlace the sayable to the said in universal, binding fashion. In this articulation, the ethics as first philosophy offers a vision beyond the law of the factory, school or prison because Lingis is keen to ascertain the limits of a modern, cold, dissecting rationality which in its most downcast moments enslaves, tortures and murders.

Ecological consciousness

In the Kantian-informed phenomenological philosophy and anthropology of Lingis, his thought addresses the question of coexistence or the Heideggerian *mitdasein*. This eco-phenomenology is a philosophy which criticises the way of life in the richest parts of the world, in what he calls the technocratic-commercial archipelago of urban technopoles. The question of justice is central in Lingis's work on the truth in reconciliation (see Rothfield *et al*, 2008). Justice is borne when we act in our name, what we assert ourselves to the *agon* of recognition and contestation. Moreover, Lingis adds to the Kantian imperative a rumination on the force of the imperative – which has *a priori* status – there is a demand that that we act justly. The elemental imperative is prior to the concrete encounter with alterity. Such a phenomenology exposes the presuppositions of normative ethics. It undergirds the moral law binding and allows for its form and formulation. Contra Nozaki, the imperatives in things demands neither a universal and necessary form of responses. The imperative is not a force of law but a portentous event. Obedience to the levels is primary and the condition of possibility of any initiative any freedom and sensibility and movement. The agency of welcome and summons could well be from other animals - the summons could come from plants. Explaining transcendent objects, Lingis (1998, p. 175) cites justice and truth as examples: “The very notion of justice

goes beyond what is doable.... Without a passion for justice and truth, whatever I do with my neighbor ... becomes a reciprocal egoism and whatever we agree upon becomes our ideology.” Without transcendent goals, our actions become exercises of mere self-interest. As transcendent objects, truth and justice go beyond our self-interest. Reworking Levinas’s concept of exposure to and immediate contact with the vulnerability of the other, Lingis says suffering is perceived as one senses it at the surface of contact.

For Lingis, moral agency and responsibility respond to an imperative sited between Kant’s categorical and hypothetical imperatives. Moral agency begins in subjection to an originary imperative force. Obligation to the suffering of the other is immediate, beyond the mediation of mutual recognition. For Lingis, in fatigue and exhaustion, the other exposes his or her vulnerability to offenses and humiliation. This suffering afflicts my sensibility immediately (Lingis, 1994, p.29- 30). This face which faces humiliation, fatigue, pain, faces me with an imperative that cannot wait for my descriptive accounting. This vulnerability, pleads, demands a response. In the encounter with the other, Lingis finds ‘the noise of another person’s life disturbing the tranquillity of mine’ (1994, p. 28).

Ecology pertains fundamentally to coexistence. In *Being Singular Plural* (2000), Nancy states that existence is always already coexistence, where ‘being’ is only ever our ‘being-with’. To be is to be-with. And to be co-present is to be with. This being-with is a radical once, a radical intimacy, for to coexist is to be with other beings, sentient and otherwise, animal, vegetal, mineral. Quite clearly sustainable existence is only obtainable through coexistence. Co-destruction or co-nonexistence does not get us very far beyond the apocalypse. Here Lingis writes (see Rothfield, 2008) that unless people can envision and hope for a situation when they would coexist with their enemies without being degraded, humiliated, and oppressed by them, coexistence and reconciliation will not be

possible.

Nancy's answer to the question of how I address injustice is with unquenched anger. It is with frustration and rage. That well of emotion, that surge of the visceral is the beginning of politics, of a politics of the new. There is a need for symbiosis and settlement. Being is being with, the first-person subjectivity, the 'I', is not prior to 'we'. In the first instance, the 'we' is a non-subject. But more than nothing; it is 'someone' each time, as 'each one' is someone. The 'we' is uttered in a specific amalgam, group, or network. In the second, the 'we' is *for* 'everyone', for the coexistence of the universe of things, animals, and people that is mute and without 'us'. As Nancy puts it, it is in 'the touch of the world' (2000, p. 13), the being-together that a truth is presented in the *with* of coexistence. The 'we' is the 'singularly plural coexistence' *in* which being circulates and *as* which it circulates among such selves within the 'we'. The imperative comes from the being-with because it in mutual abandonment and exposure to each other, that one forms the 'I'.

Lingis's ecological vision here is an ethical one for sensitivity as *blessing* 'is the beginning and the end of all ecological awareness (2000, p. 71)'. For Lingis, it is in the relationship with alterity that one finds oneself commanded, contested, forced to answer to another for what one does and for what one is. One is addressed. One is appealed to. Things in the world have a force and a say in life. The solitary 'I' does not so much interpret and manipulate its surroundings but through its heteronomy is always-already in the midst of directives, emanations and compulsions. As such it is perturbed, exited, thrilled and transformed by things in and of the universe.

In thinking the imperative in this manner – through a philosophical reworking of Levinas, Merleau-Ponty and Kant, Lingis finds the ethical act in the confrontation and encounter with other beings, not just of one's own ilk. The

demands put on the 'I' are not just human demands but originate from other species, even inanimate objects. If one comes upon an injured animal, or one understands the risk to a particular environment, there is a strong imperative to care, to act justly, to do the right thing. As ethical imperatives derive not only from other humans, but also from animals, plants, and even inanimate objects, Lingis gives the example of an imperative command to snub out a smouldering cigarette butt dropped in the sequoia forest despite being alone. Here and to return to Lingis's Manchester talk, the imperative commands not through verdicts and the ordering of the *mots ordre* but directs and guides. Harman concurs and puts it like this: "We listen and respond to the weakness of the bird and the frailty of the flower, and ratchet our tenderness or viciousness up to the appropriate level needed to comfort or destroy these creatures" (2005, p. 63). Lingis's phenomenology is a kind of sublime to think the intimacy with the real. It is aesthetics as first philosophy which seeks to disclose the things themselves; it is a way of listening to the murmur of the world, beyond the world of work and reason, other than the hither and thither than what goes for communication in the archipelago of urban technopoles.

References

- Arendt, H., & Canovan, M. (1998). *The human condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Buckner, S. C., & Statler, M. (2006). *Styles of piety: Practicing philosophy after the death of God*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Bradley, J. (2011). Becoming-troglodyte, Singularum. <http://singularum.com/>
- Brassier, R. (2007). *Nihil unbound: Enlightenment and extinction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*.

- Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1995) *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, M. Joughin (trans.), (New York, Columbia University Press).
- Harman, G. (2005). *Guerrilla metaphysics: Phenomenology and the carpentry of things*. Chicago: Open Court.
- Harman, G. (2010). *Towards speculative realism: Essays and lectures*. Winchester, UK: Zero Books.
- Imanishi, K., & Asquith, P. J. (2002). *A Japanese view of nature: The world of living things*. London: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Kropotkin, P. A., Huxley, T. H., & Paul Avrich Collection (Library of Congress). (1955). *Mutual aid, a factor of evolution*. Boston: Extending Horizons Books.
- Lévinas, E., & Lingis, A. (2002). *Otherwise than being or beyond essence*. Pittsburgh, Pa: Duquesne Univ. Pr.
- Lingis, A. (1986). *Phenomenological explanations*. Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff.
- Lingis, A. (January 01, 1988). The Elemental Imperative. *Research in Phenomenology*, 18, 1, 3-21.
- Lingis, A. (1989). *Deathbound Subjectivity*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- Lingis, A. (1994a). *The community of those who have nothing in common* Bloomington: University Press.
- Lingis, A. (September 1994b). Intentionality and the Imperative. *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 34, no. 3, issue no. 135.
- Lingis, A. (1998). *The imperative*. Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press.
- Lingis, A. (2000). *Dangerous emotions*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lingis, A. (September 01, 2001). Ecological Consciousness: Reflections on Hominids and Other Thinking Animals. *Critical Horizons*, 2, 2, 283-300.
- Lingis, A. (January 23, 2003). Unintelligible Lines, Unknown Paths. Lecture.
- Lingis, A. (May 01, 2005). New Walls in the Information Age. *Social Identities*, 11, 3, 271-282.
- Lingis, A. (2012a). The Return of Subjectivity [lecture], Society of European Philosophy 2012 conference, Manchester Metropolitan University, England,

September 6th 2012.

- Lingis, A. (April 01, 2012b). Return of the First-Person Singular: The Science of Subjectivity and the Sciences *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 26, 2, 163-174.
- Lorek-Jezińska, E., Więckowska, K., & Wydawn. Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Korpenika. (2005). *Corporeal inscriptions: Representations of the body in cultural and literary texts and practices*. Toruń: Wydawn. Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Korpenika.
- Meillassoux, Q. (2008). *After finitude: An essay on the necessity of contingency*. London: Continuum.
- Morton, T. (2007). *Ecology without nature: Rethinking environmental aesthetics*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Morton, T. (Tuesday, November 9, 2010). Ecology Without Nature blog, <http://ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.com/2010/11/hyperobjects-are-nonlocal.html>
- Morton, T. (2011). *Here Comes Everything: The Promise of Object-Oriented Ontology*. University of Nebraska Press.
- Nancy, J.-L. (1991). *The inoperative community*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Nancy, J.-L. (2000). *Being singular plural*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- Nozaki, Y. (2008). 正義と反合理主義：リンギス・レヴィナス・デリダ(Justice and anti-rationalism : Lingis, Lévinas, and Derrida). 大阪府立大学大学院人間社会学研究科. 4, p.163-182.
- Ogawa, T., Lazarin, M., & Rappe, G. (1998). *Interkulturelle Philosophie und Phänomenologie in Japan: Beiträge über Grenzen hinweg*. München: Iudicium Verl.
- Olkowski, J. (2011). What is an Imperative?, Singularum. <http://singularum.com>.
- Rothfield, P., Fleming, C., & Komesaroff, P. A. (2008). *Pathways to reconciliation: Between theory and practice*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate.
- Ryder, Andrew. (2012). *Revolution without Guarantees: Community and Subjectivity in Nancy, Lingis, Sartre and Levinas*. University Library System, University of Pittsburgh.

- Sheppard, D., Sparks, S., & Thomas, C. (1997). *On Jean-Luc Nancy: The sense of philosophy*. London: Routledge.
- Skačkauskas, J. (2011). Interview with Alphonso Lingis, Singularum. <http://singularum.com/>
- Sparrow, T. (January 01, 2008). Enabling/Disabling Sensation: Toward an Alimentary Imperative in Carnal *Phenomenology*. *Philosophy Today Michigan Then Chicago-*, 52, 2, 99-115.
- Sparrow, T. (2009). *Sensation Rebuilt: Carnal Ontology in Levinas and Merleau-Ponty*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation
- Taylor, V. E., & Winkquist, C. E. (2002). *Encyclopedia of postmodernism*. London: Routledge.
- Wheeler, R. C. (2008). *Kantian form and phenomenological force: Kant's Imperatives and the directives of contemporary phenomenology*. Washington, D.C: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.